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The True Criterion of Orthodoxy.

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Among the numerous questions that have come to the front in connection with the controversy between Fundamentalists and Liberalists, the one pertaining to the true criterion of orthodoxy is no doubt foremost in importance. In the general confusion which has followed in the wake of the discussion, men have repeatedly asked: What determines orthodoxy? Is orthodoxy a creedal shibboleth or merely a spiritual principle? That so simple a query has been raised in sober earnest, indeed, that it has been made a *status controversiae* in a controversy that engages the minds of learned theologians, is certainly a *testimonium paupertatis* to the present-day Christian Church. It shows the extent of the decay which rationalism has caused in the Church, and proves that the canker of infidelity, having already blighted the whole body of Christian doctrine, is about to destroy the very core of the Christian faith. No truly Christian theologian would seriously put that question and make it the subject of dubious inquiry. To every believing theologian the issue is clear from the start. He knows what orthodoxy means and entertains no doubts in regard to its criterion. To him there is only one test of orthodoxy — the Word of God. Only that is orthodox which is Biblical. *Quod non est Biblicum non est theologicum.* It is only since Modernism has discarded the fundamentals of Christian belief and annulled every article of the faith which was formerly regarded as an impregnable fortress that men must again ask what orthodoxy is and by what standard it should be gauged.

Of course, the reply of Modernists is negative. According to the liberalistic views of modern theologians, orthodoxy has nothing to do with dogma, tenet, or creed. Orthodoxy is therefore no creedal shibboleth. It is not determined by any confession or

standard of faith. If orthodoxy is anything, it is only a spiritual principle, a dynamic force which impels man to a life in accord with that of Christ. In the *Watchman-Examiner* (May, 1922) the following definition of what orthodoxy might mean to the theologian of our time was suggested in reply to the question, Who is orthodox? The following answer was given: "He is orthodox whose views of God, of Jesus Christ, of man and their mutual relations, are such as lead him to love as God loves, to live as Christ lived, and to be a brother to his fellow-men. The only true and adequate test of the correctness of man's religious views is their result in his life. Absolutely, there is no Baptist dogmatic by which a man's beliefs may be judged. The basis of our fellowship is *participation in the common life in Christ, not a form of doctrine*; and from the point of view of our constitution as churches, *the only heretic is one who ventures to propound a dogmatic and to test men by it.*"

This statement is sufficiently clear to show what the writer's conception of orthodoxy — and orthodoxy here stands for Christianity — is. According to his conception, every one is orthodox, that is, Christian, whose religious views lead him to love and help his fellow-men and to lead a decent life. Certainly a most paganistic view of orthodoxy! It is true, the writer employs the name of God and of Christ. However, he fails to state whether the God he has in mind is the Triune God; and it is clear that he does not care to have any definite Christian dogma or teaching connected with the person and work of Christ. "The basis of our fellowship is *participation in the common life in Christ, not a form of doctrine*," he states emphatically. What this "common life in Christ" is, how it is brought about and preserved, the writer does not say. One thing, however, is apparent: in the common life in Christ no *form of doctrine* must determine Christian fellowship. As soon as a person desires to propound a creed and to test men by it, he becomes a heretic and as such must be excommunicated. This shaft of impudent scorn and arrogant challenge, which is obviously directed against the Fundamentalists, who even now endeavor to propound a "dogmatic," shows the wide latitudinarian range of the author's proposed orthodoxy. It ultimately embraces all men, no matter what their beliefs may be. They may be Jews or Gentiles, Mohammedans or Parsees, Confucianists or Buddhists, so long as their views of God, of Jesus Christ, of man and their mutual relations, lead them to love as God loves, to live as Christ lived, and

to be brethren to their fellow-men, they are orthodox, that is, Christians. The writer would find no fault with any one's Christianity on doctrinal grounds. The only trouble arises when some one demands a creed, embracing, for example, the propositions that no other than the Triune God should be worshiped; that Christ should be acknowledged as the divine Son of God and true man, born of the Virgin Mary, the only Savior of man; and that the Bible should be accepted as the authoritative Word of God. In the ranks of fellowshippers to which the writer belongs, such a request would at once create unspeakable commotion. There would be serious trouble. The unlucky Fundamentalist who voices the demand would at once be excommunicated as a heretic, for "he is the only heretic who ventures to propound a dogmatic and to test men by it."

As if the statement were not clear enough to set forth the writer's warped views of Christianity, the following elucidations are appended for the benefit of those who may not have understood his argument. We read: "For instance, if a man finds that some doctrine of the Bible other than the theory of infallible verbal inspiration of its writings makes the book of greater utility and power in his life, more certainly brings him into touch with the power of God, and better enables him to love as God loves or live as Christ lived: *if this doctrine of his better ministers to his need to attain Christly character, then his view is right, allowable, and justified, and to stigmatize him as a heretic is a blind folly on the part of the Church.*" Let the reader contemplate what this sentence means. In unmistakable words the writer claims that if any one should see fit to deny the inspiration of the Bible because he finds that this denial better ministers [to his need] to attain Christly character, then his view is right and justified, and to stigmatize him as a heretic is a blind folly on the part of the Church.

But to proceed. The writer goes on: "Or again, if the theory of evolution conceived as the method by which God brought the universe and its variety of beings into existence is one that to his mind and heart more surely glorifies God than a theory of a *fiat*-creation; if the evolutionary process seems the more normal and rational conception of the present activity of God, and such a conception best enables him to give himself to the influence and power of divine spirit, *then every law of psychology and every principle of Christ is violated* by forbidding such a doctrine or by refusing fellowship to him who holds the view." In this paragraph the writer expresses himself even more forcibly. To stigmatize one

who denies the inspiration of the Bible as a heretic is, in his mind, blind folly on the part of the Church. However, to question or deny the orthodoxy of one who rejects the Biblical report of creation and believes in evolution means, according to the writer, *to violate every law of psychology and every principle of Christ.*

If the Christian reader has thus far failed to gasp at these impudent challenges, he will surely do so when he reads the following: "Once more, if one sincerely finds the current conception of God as One who needs propitiation before He can or will forgive and save men; if he finds this doctrine repugnant to his own idea of a moral God and discredited by the revelation of God in Jesus Christ; and if he holds to Paul's doctrine of the grace of God in Jesus Christ, believing that Jesus came to save men from sin rather than to save them from God; and if this doctrine most and best aids him in loving God, in forgiving as God forgives, and in living like Christ, *then he is orthodox in the only worthy sense, and it is the infatuation of dogmatism to stamp him with theological odium.*"

It was this paragraph mainly which induced us to reply to this most brazen piece of effrontery. Of course, anybody is free to reject the Bible, to adopt the views of evolutionary science, and to deny the vicarious satisfaction of Christ. However, heretofore such men as saw fit to differ from Christian theology were honest enough to confess that they refused to be styled Christians. Men like Voltaire, Ingersoll, Diderot, and Tom Paine very emphatically refused to be called Christian because the Christian faith was repugnant to them. However, here it is claimed and insisted upon that every deist, agnostic, atheist, and naturalist is entitled to the privilege of calling his specific religious views orthodox and Christian, and that to stigmatize them as heretical is a violation of every "law of psychology and every principle of Christ."

If the above had appeared in a monistic, Unitarian, or Masonic periodical, it would not have surprised any one. However, it has come to us, as it has come to many thousands of Christian readers, through the columns of a periodical which is outspoken in its defense of the fundamentals of the Christian faith. This shows the confusion which prevails in many of the sectarian churches, especially in the Baptist. There two factors, one liberal and the other conservative, labor side by side in the same pulpits, the same schools, and the same editorial offices, and both demand a hearing, each party setting forth its claim and denouncing the other. Nevertheless, the external union of the church-body must be preserved.

By no means will either party come out and be separate. So we may view the above statement as a sort of compromise. Fundamentalists and Liberalists cannot agree as to doctrine. Even the weakest doctrinal platform is offensive to the Modernist faction; hence the compromise to preserve a union not on the basis of *one common faith*, but upon that of a *common life in Christ!* In other words, if those who bear the name Baptist agree to observe a certain standard in their lives in accord with the general ideals of Christianity, they are to be received as brethren, and fellowship is to be extended to them, no matter what their belief may be.

Fundamentalists, we are sure, do not agree to this new criterion of orthodoxy. It is thrust upon them by an overwhelming majority. However, in the end they will no doubt accept it; for, as they have shown, they are not willing "to come out from among them and be separate." They are as unionistic as the liberalistic party that opposes them. They insist upon the preservation of the union of the church-body as much as do the Rationalists. Their slogan, too, is: Let doctrinal differences by no means disrupt the Church and impede our social and missionary enterprises! We must do big things; above all, we must collect large sums to support our world program. This can never be done if we separate. Thus for the sake of secondary considerations they will, no doubt, swallow the nauseating pill and preserve the peace. However, this rotten, horrible peace is purchased at a tremendous price.

If the above criterion of orthodoxy is accepted, it means that they will give up every teaching of the Bible and thus ultimately cease to be a Christian Church. The Bible clearly proclaims itself a standard of truth. Whatever agrees with its teaching is orthodox; whatever disagrees with it is heterodox. Scripture is more than a mere code of morals. It is, first of all, a "dogmatic," a book of definite doctrines given by God to make man wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. As such, the Bible claims to be the absolute canon of truth, the only and absolute criterion of orthodoxy and heterodoxy. No other inference can be drawn from the words of the Savior in which He announces Himself as the Way, the Truth, and the Life. John 14, 6. If Christ (and not the Christ as He lived, but as He taught) is the Way and leads to the Father, then everything that is opposed to His teachings is a path that leads astray. If He is the Truth, then whatever is taught in opposition to His Word is falsehood. If He is the Life, then every tenet not in accord with His doctrines means endless death.

No other inference is admissible. Only he, says Christ, is of the truth who hears My voice. John 18, 37. Even so, the whole Bible is the Word of God, 2 Tim. 3, 16, for the prophets spoke by the Spirit of Christ which was in them, Heb. 2, 11. So Paul regarded not only the message which he preached, but the whole Bible, as the canon of inspired truth. Very earnestly he warns his readers against all who "walk not uprightly according to the truth of the Gospel." Gal. 2, 14; 2 Cor. 11, 2 ff. And he urges his readers, above all, to "mark them which cause divisions and offenses contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned, and avoid them." Rom. 16, 17. According to Paul every one who teaches contrary to the Word of God "teaches otherwise" (*ἕτεροδιδασκαλεῖ*), "knows nothing" (*μηδὲν ἐπιστάμενος*), and "is destitute of the truth." 1 Tim. 6, 3, 4. Thus the issue is clear. Orthodoxy, according to Christ and the apostles, is absolute and unqualified adherence to the standards of Scriptural truth. Whatever doctrines are opposed to the teachings of Scripture are false doctrines, taught by false prophets, of whom the disciples of Christ are to beware. Matt. 7, 15. Any church, therefore, that fails to accept this standard of truth is a heterodox, unchristian, and antichristian church.

Again, if the above criterion of orthodoxy is accepted, the Baptist Church must needs become unchristian also in life. If the Bible is the Word of Truth which alone can save men's souls, Rom. 1, 16, if it is the power of God by which the Holy Ghost regenerates and sanctifies men, then any one who rejects this Word of God remains dead in sin and under the curse and condemnation of divine Law. Let those who glibly speak of loving as God loves, of living as Christ lived, and of leading a common life in Christ, remember that Christian love towards God, the Christian life in Christ, and true, Christian benevolence towards the brethren flow only from faith. Christ made this clear when He said: "I am the Vine; ye are the branches. He that abideth in Me and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit; for without Me ye can do nothing." John 15, 5. Here Christ avers that without faith in Him man cannot love as God loves, live as Christ lived, and love the brethren. No one can come in touch with the power of God, attain Christly character, give himself to the influence and power of the divine Spirit, in fact, can do nothing, without faith in Christ. The common life in Christ demands, first of all, faith in Christ; and faith in Christ means to believe His Word. So Christ says in John 8, 31: "If ye continue in My Word, then are ye My disciples

indeed; and ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free." Accordingly, the writer's prattle concerning a common life in Christ, without accepting the Word of Christ in its truth and purity, is nothing but a decoy to mislead the simple. "He that believeth not shall be damned." Mark 16, 16. If any one refuses to accept the Word of God and to believe in Christ, even his best works of love, his charity and benevolence, are but *splendida vitia* before God. Hence, no church which rejects the Word of God can expect to be fruitful in good works, but comes under the condemnation of which Paul speaks in Rom. 1, 21. A church so utterly rebellious and unfaithful as the writer of the quoted paragraphs would have it to be stands condemned and rejected. "Because that, when they knew God, they glorified Him not as God, neither were thankful, but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened. Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools, and changed the glory of the uncorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man, and to birds, and four-footed beasts, and creeping things." Rom. 1, 21—23.

Accepting the proposed criterion of orthodoxy, what kind of orthodoxy will be left to the Church? Religion has for its prime objective the salvation of men. It is true, the social gospel of the present-day Liberalists refuses to have anything to do with an eternal salvation. The social theology of our day is of this earth only, and seeks only the interests of this life. Nevertheless, as long as the hope of immortality remains in the hearts of men, so long will men desire salvation also beyond this life. Now, then, how must this salvation be secured? The modern theology rejects Christ's atonement and the fundamental doctrine of the Gospel concerning salvation through faith in Christ. Having rejected this blessed Way to life, how shall man secure salvation? There remains but one alternative — man must earn his salvation by loving as God loves, by living as Christ lived, by being a friend to his fellow-men. That is the "orthodox" plan of salvation of the present-day rationalistic church. However, this is a paganistic orthodoxy. Of this orthodoxy Paul says: "For as many as are of the works of the Law are under the curse." Gal. 3, 10. It is a damnable orthodoxy.

If that is true, then the outlook for the modern "Christian" orthodox church, of the kind which rationalistic theologians advocate, is dreary indeed. The future "Christian" church will have no Savior to take away man's sin, to regenerate, to redeem, and save. It cannot satisfy the yearnings of the soul; it is bare, dreadful,

comfortless. It has no consolation for the tribulation of this life, and no assuring message for the hour when the sinner must stand before God. It teaches sinners to reject God's Word and leaves them rejected of God. Hos. 4, 6. It can only urge the despairing sinner to do the impossible: to appease God's wrath by works which provoke wrath. Verily, the new criterion of orthodoxy is a most miserable surrogate for that which is offered to man in the Word of God. — Let the churches accept it — and be damned.

The writer of the proposed test of orthodoxy has sought to ingratiate his criterion by a most clever sophism. By putting the question as he did: Is orthodoxy a creedal shibboleth or a spiritual principle? he has succeeded in concealing and eliminating the true criterion of orthodoxy. Creeds are not popular in our time. Even churches dislike creeds. Moreover, creeds are made by men, and whatever is of men may be rejected by men. Thus from the start, as the reader scrutinizes the question, he will be inclined to favor the writer's view-point. If anything else can be offered as a criterion of orthodoxy than an offensive, unpopular creed, all the better! No doubt the majority of those who voted down the Fundamentalists at Indianapolis did so because of their opposition to binding creeds. Now, it is true, creeds are of relative value only. Any Christian may reject a creed, and must, under certain conditions, reject a creed. If a creed stands for something which man teaches in opposition to God's Word, it cannot demand recognition or acceptance. Thus the creeds of modern Liberalists — and they have creeds, very definite and clearly expressed creeds — must be rejected because they represent the carnal, devilish wisdom of unbelieving men. However, it is a different matter when a creed is a clear, reliable, and precise statement of Scriptural truth. In that case the creed is indeed a criterion of orthodoxy. Any one who accepts such a *regula fidei* is orthodox, and any one who rejects it is heterodox. The old definition of orthodoxy as made by Isidore Hispaliensis obtains to this day: "*Orthodoxus est recte credens.*" And *recte credens* means to acknowledge the norm of Scripture. Scripture must ever remain the source and norm of every creed, the true criterion of orthodoxy. This true standard of orthodoxy was restored to the Church by Luther, who assigned to the Holy Scriptures their rightful place as the only standard by which all doctrines are to be adjudicated. Very emphatically the Formula of Concord says: "*Credimus, confitemur et docemus unicam regulam et normam, secundum quam omnia dogmata omnesque*

doctores aestimari et iudicari oporteat, nullam omnino aliam esse quam prophetica et apostolica scripta cum Veteris tum Novi Testamenti." (*Conc. Trigl.*, 777.) If Lutheran theologians subscribe to the Confessions of their Church not only *quatenus*, but also *quia*, it is because they are firmly convinced that the doctrines set forth in their standards of faith are the clear, precise, and infallible teachings of the Holy Scriptures. Hence they prize their Confessions and demand that all teachings conform to their Confessions; although the Word of God remains the only source and norm of faith, the *norma normans*.

True and Christian creeds, conforming in every respect to the teachings of the Holy Scriptures, are indeed necessary. Let the Fundamentalists bear this in mind. As surely as each individual Christian should give an account of the faith that is in him, so each church must give an account of its faith by means of confessions; and each church, in order that it may profess the Christian faith, must demand of its constituents adherence to its confession of faith. If the Indianapolis convention declared that Scripture alone should serve all Baptists as a creed, it was in the right theoretically only, not practically. The Holy Scriptures are indeed the only norm of orthodoxy; hence, if all Baptists would receive the teachings of Scripture as they stand and are written in unmistakable terms, then, indeed, every Baptist would be orthodox. However, this is not the case. The Liberalists reject even the fundamental teachings of Scripture. Even while employing Scriptural terms, they teach the very opposite of what Christ teaches. Thus the terms regeneration, faith, conversion, salvation, atonement, etc., are used in a meaning absolutely different from that employed by orthodox theology. And as long as this is the case, the Fundamentalists must insist upon the adoption of a creed which expresses in clear terms the doctrines of the Bible. If they cannot enforce this, there remains but one alternative, *viz.*, to come out from among the ungodly, liberalistic congregation of scoffers and be separate. — We have a few more things that we would like to say in this connection, and inculcate upon the Fundamentalists; however, let this suffice.

It is clear why the Liberalistic element in Indianapolis opposed the adoption of the Fundamentalists' creed. Rationalistic theology has discarded the Holy Scriptures and refuses to recognize their authority and demands. It has cast overboard every vital, essential doctrine of the Christian faith. Hence it is clear why

its adherents demand as a criterion of a man's orthodoxy only a righteous life. Having rejected the Christian truth, nothing remains for the advocates of modernism but to teach the paganistic, naturalistic way of salvation by work-righteousness. Accordingly, to them only he is orthodox who pursues this way and endeavors to merit heaven by holy living. For this reason they no longer can claim the name Christian. Their theology is antagonistic to Christ and ruinous to souls redeemed by Christ. Their theology is of the devil.
